



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



STALZER AND ZIKMUND RECOGNIZED BY SD VETERANS COUNCIL

Senator Jim Stalzer and Representative Larry Zikmund were recognized by the South Dakota Veterans Council yesterday at their quarterly meeting. They were honored for their efforts in securing legislation to construct a state veterans cemetery.

They both were presented the *Chet Sorenson Award*, in recognition of showing outstanding dedication to the task of serving other veterans.

The South Dakota Veterans Council is made up of the American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of American and the Vietnam Veterans of America.

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VA DEBT MANAGEMENT CENTER REDUCES WAIT TIMES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) [Debt Management Center \(DMC\)](#) reached a recent milestone this July when it reported it had lowered the average wait times for Veterans contacting the call center, from over 21 minutes in fiscal year (FY) 2016 to under five minutes during FY 2018.

"The team at the DMC has enhanced services to our Veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "It's our mission to take care of our Veterans, no matter what their needs are. DMC is in concert with our priority of improving customer service and will continue to gather customer feedback through direct feedback, surveys and outreach in FY19 to further enhance the Veterans' experience."

For the past three years, DMC received around 1 million calls annually with an average call wait time of about 21 minutes. In FY 2017, DMC launched a series of internal efficiencies and process improvements to enhance contact center capabilities.

Initiatives included enhancing staffing levels to meet demand, enhancing contact center technology, focusing on employee development and engagement, and implementing an automated 12-month payment plan.

These Veteran-focused initiatives represent a 79 percent reduction over two years to the average time for waiting and a 40 percent increase of actual calls taken. These are all indicators of successful initiatives providing a better experience for Veterans and VA employees.

The DMC's inbound contact center serves as the central point for Veterans and their family members to make payment arrangements, or receive guidance regarding the collection process on overpayments which could include debts created from education or pension payments.

Debt counselors at the DMC work with callers in a professional and service-oriented manner to help them understand their options to address overpayments with Veterans either through extended repayment plans, the dispute process, compromise process or waiver process

DMC's contact center provides debt counseling for the Veterans Benefits Administration, and consolidated collection services of non-health care debt for Veterans Health Administration and National Cemetery Administration, enabling these entities to focus resources on accomplishing their core missions.

DMC has provided centralized debt collection programs of Veteran benefit overpayments since 1975 and became a fee-for-service Enterprise Center in 1996.



PURPLE HEART TRAIL

ABN Army Surplus in Sioux Falls, South Dakota signed a Proclamation proclaiming to be a Purple Heart Business.

Holding their Purple Heart Business sign and the Combat Wounded Parking sign is Roxann Zenobi who is pictured to the left with Ken Teunissen of the Department of the Dakotas Commander. Thanks to ABN Army Surplus for supporting the MOPH Chapters and Department of the Dakotas and honoring our Nation's Purple Heart recipients!



On Thursday, October 11, Big Paws Canine Inc. was proclaimed a "Purple Heart Business". Big Paws Canine Foundation's mission is to provide service, therapy and companion dogs to disabled veterans and former first responders, such as peace officers and firefighters injured in the line of duty, while creating jobs and volunteer opportunities through education of the community.

The Proclamation was signed and presented by Sr. Vice Commander Patriot Rob Dickerson, his Spouse Gail Dickerson, and Chapter Commander Patriot Ken Teunissen.

HAMLIN COUNTY NAMES HIGHWAY FOR PFC TUIN

Family, friends and Hamlin County Commissioners gathered in Hayti last week for the dedication of PFC John Tuin US Army Memorial Highway.

David Schaefer, Hamlin County Veterans Service Officer, did all the behind the scenes work to mark this special day in history. SDDVA Program Manager Erin Brown and Field Service Officer Brett Dickerson were on hand for the dedication.

Thanks David, for finding yet another way to honor our great heroes!



SAMMONS DONATES TO VHI

Sammons® Financial Group Member Companies recently donated \$20,000 to support the Veterans Honored Interment (VHI) project. The funds will be used to purchase tools used by veterans to construct burial vessels for qualifying veterans.

VHI is a nonprofit organization supported entirely through donations. It was started in 1999 by Paul Redfield, a resident of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice South Dakota Veterans Home, as a means of providing honorable and dignified burial vessels to veterans and their spouses. The staff is comprised of veterans who hand-make caskets and urns that are donated to qualifying veterans, and their spouses, residing in South Dakota. Approximately 50 caskets and 50 urns are crafted each year.



MILESTONE REACHED FOR VA CLAIMS MODERNIZATION

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently completed a significant modernization effort in which more than 7.8 million paper files were removed from 60 locations in fewer than 22 months, enabling rapid scanning into the VA's electronic claims processing system by multiple third-party vendors. Hopefully this will speed up claims decisions for veterans.

This milestone was part of a long VA effort to improve the Veteran experience and streamline claims processes. In 2013, the VA began removing paper records from its regional offices to save space and taxpayer money. The effort expanded in 2016 when the agency launched the File Bank Extraction initiative. This initiative removed more than 1.7 million paper claims files across 59 VA locations and contributed to reduced claims processing time by establishing more electronic records.

Additionally, in Nov. 2017, the VA began extracting nearly 6.1 million paper records held within the Records Control Division (RCD) of the Records Management Center (RMC) in St. Louis. The VA is currently working with the General Services Administration (GSA), which owns the Goodfellow Federal Center complex that houses the RMC, to return the RCD's leased warehouse space back to GSA. As a result, VA will save nearly \$1.8 million per year. The other areas of the RMC remain open and operational. The 6.1 million paper records extracted from the RCD are temporarily stored in a secure facility certified by the National Archives and Records Administration where they are inventoried, prioritized and sent to multiple VA vendors for rapid scanning into VA's Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). Records removed during File Bank Extraction will also be scanned and uploaded to VBMS.

VA continues to take steps to operate in a digital environment and modernize the way it processes compensation and pension claims — moving from a cumbersome, paper-intensive process to an efficient, electronic process — resulting in a faster, more accurate and transparent claims process.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 11—Veterans Day
Nov 12—State Offices Closed
Nov 16—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)
Nov 16—Dakota Dunes CBOC Open House—2:00 pm (CT)
Nov 22-23—State Offices Closed
Dec 4—Governor’s Budget Address—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
Dec 10—Wreaths Across America Ceremony—Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial—Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 24-25—State Offices Closed
Dec 31-Jan 1—State Offices Closed
Jan 8—Governor’s State of the State—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
Jan 13-18—VFW Accredited Service Officer Training—Annapolis, MD
Feb 8-10—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish
Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference
July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL



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